

In confidence

BCB(11) 1st meeting

Tuesday 08 February 2011

## **MINUTES**

### **Present**

Alan Buckle	Deputy Chair
James Boyle	
Pamela Gillies	
Tony Hall	(items 1 – 11)
Sue Hoyle	
Claire Ighodaro	
Howell James	(items 1 – 8)
Steve Jones	
Patrick McKenna	
Raoul Shah	(items 1 – 8)

### **In attendance**

Martin Davidson, Chief Executive  
Pippa Greenslade, Director Global HR  
Adrian Greer, Director Network  
Mark Robson, Director English  
Bidesh Sarkar, Chief Financial Officer  
Cathy Stephens, Ag Director Education & Society  
Rebecca Walton, Ag Director Arts  
John Worne, Director Corporate HQ  
*Information in this section has been redacted/removed as it is likely to be exempt from disclosure on the grounds that it contains "personal data" as defined in Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000\*.* (item 7)  
Andy Mackay, Secretary

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Vernon Ellis and Nihal Arthanayake had sent apologies for their absence. Raoul Shah and Tony Hall apologised for commitments which would require them to leave before the end of the meeting.

The Chair welcomed James Boyle, who was attending his first meeting as the co-opted Trustee in his role as Chair of the Scotland Advisory Committee and Adrian Greer, Director Network, who was attending his first meeting in this role. He also recorded the warm thanks of the Board to Cathy Stephens, who was attending her last meeting before retiring, for her thirty two years of distinguished service to the British Council in a range of roles around the world.

The Board offered their congratulations to Vernon Ellis and to Sue Hoyle on the award in the Queen's New Year honours list of a knighthood and an OBE respectively.

### **2&3. Minutes of the Board meeting of December 2010 and the extraordinary Board meeting of January 2011 and matters arising**

All matters arising from the meetings were being actioned and item 7 from the meeting of 20 April would be covered in the agenda for a future meeting, following the completion of the strategy review.

The minutes were approved.

#### **4. Chair's business**

The Board noted the Chair's written notes which had been circulated with the papers in advance of the meeting.

#### **5. Report from Audit Committee**

The Chair of the Audit Committee reported on key topics from their meeting which had taken place on 07 February.

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#### **6. Chief Executive's Report**

Martin Davidson updated Trustees on the security situation for British Council operations in countries in the Middle East and North Africa which were experiencing civil unrest. Teaching staff were returning to Tunisia this week and full operations were being resumed. It had been noted and hugely appreciated that the British Council had retained a presence in Tunisia throughout the crisis, which had underscored the level of organisational commitment.

More than ninety teachers had been evacuated from Egypt where all operations in Cairo and Alexandria had been suspended; the Director and Teaching Centre Manager remained in country and were in close contact with locally engaged colleagues. The current objective was to reopen operations to hold an examinations session on Saturday 12 February, and to aim to reopen the Teaching Centres by the end of the month, if the security situation allowed. Again, the continuing commitment and presence of the British Council had been noted and was greatly appreciated.

The situation in Sudan and Yemen continued to be monitored for any increase in the level of security threat.

Martin Davidson commended to the Board the work of the incident control teams and senior staff and their teams in both Tunisia and Egypt. They had performed extremely well in demanding and stressful circumstances.

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Trustees requested to be sent copies of the letters which had been sent to their constituency MP concerning the activity of the British Council in their area.

#### **7. Organisational Performance Report**

Bidesh Sarkar requested Trustees to send him any suggestions for further improvement of the content or presentation of the Performance Report.

John Worne briefed Trustees on updated forecasts for audience in the report, which covered the period to the end of December. All targets were set to be exceeded, with significant growth particularly in engagement with young people and those who influenced them.

The Board discussed the quality measures used, particularly the recommendation score, which followed a net promote score commonly used in commercial environments. They agreed that it was useful to compare achievements to those of commercial organisations but suggested that a simpler, more transparent measure might be more appropriate for use in reporting externally. They also

suggested that it would be helpful to have some benchmarks against which to judge the scores. They requested the Performance Measurement team to consider how that could be developed.

Bidesh Sarkar reported that income was tracking below plan; this was partly the result of reductions in government funding contributions beyond the core grant and partly was due to a significant reduction in the projected partnership income. Key risks for the remainder of the year were any further erosion of partnership income and continuing loss of income from the suspension of activities in Egypt. The forecast, however, was for FCR reserves to be at an adequate level to allow for investment in growth and efficiency in 2011/12; this would be critical for delivery of the proposed targets.

## **8. British Council Corporate Plan**

Trustees endorsed the work undertaken by the Executive to develop the outline and targets for the Corporate Plan in line with their discussion and steer at meetings over the past months. They agreed that the content reflected their conclusions and the strategic frame document which they had approved at their previous meeting. They identified a number of areas for further review and development.

They would welcome a clearer articulation of the goal towards which the assets of the organisation, and more broadly the UK, in the arts, education and English were being leveraged. They suggested that the whole plan should be developed with a focus on a clear picture for an external audience of the organisational vision for 2015 and how that would differ from now. The plan could then describe the means by which these changes and developments would be successfully implemented. The plan should be bold and brave and give the reader a clear sense of the choices and decisions which had already been made. There had been significant success through the life of the previous corporate plan, and the organisation should draw on that and project proudly and confidently its ability to continue to thrive and grow.

There were currently a significant number of priorities contained within the plan. Trustees suggested that this could be reviewed to establish a smaller number of contextual factors and a reduced number of key priorities. It was agreed that the plan should include and reflect the organisations values and principles.

The financial and non financial targets in the plan were ambitious. The Executive was confident that they could be delivered and agreed with the Trustees that there should be a clearer link between the overall strategy and the financial plans which would underpin implementation and delivery. This would help to explain the resource which would be necessary to deliver in all categories of objectives.

The nature and content of the partnerships which were being targeted should be more clearly defined and explained. They recognised that partners would be a critical component of successful delivery of strategy on the scale anticipated but were not currently clear about the nature of the contribution which partners would make.

Additionally, the plan could give fuller detail about the digital aspirations of the organisation. These were clearly of fundamental importance for the future and the Trustees would appreciate more detail on how to achieve the digital changes required.

Trustees had previously agreed the development of the interdependent organisation with the strategic business unit structure which was now under implementation. Within that, it was important to maintain the centrality of a commercial approach to all activity. This would be exemplified through the discussion of examinations work which was scheduled for the next meeting.

Trustees agreed that there was still much detail about which they would welcome a discussion, but that this would not be possible in the required time frame for delivery of the corporate plan. They agreed that they would review a plan for submission to the Foreign Office minister at the meeting in April, with the goal of seeking ministerial clearance so that they could approve the finalised plan at the May meeting. Additionally, a forward schedule of key areas of strategic interest for focus in meetings over the coming twelve months would be prepared. The discussion on examinations in April would be the first of these.

## 9. Treasury and Banking Policy

The Treasury and Banking policy had been revised in the light of suggestion from Trustees at the last meeting of the Board. The revised policy had been approved by the Audit Committee for recommendation to the Board of Trustees. The policy was approved unanimously for implementation.

## 10. British Council: Highlights of 2010/11

Trustees welcomed enthusiastically the summary of key project activity delivered by the British Council during 2010/11. They requested similar updates on a periodic basis and agreed that the activities and stories presented would form a good component for the content of the annual report and accounts.

## 11. British Council Annual Report and Accounts

The Board endorsed the proposed approach to the development of the Annual Report and Accounts. Sue Hoyle, Howell James and Raoul Shah agreed to provide input and guidance to the report editorial team. As in previous years, the report would be circulated to all Trustees in draft for their comment.

The Board agreed that presentation of the report to the devolved administrations should be co-ordinated through the UK region.

## 12. Civil Society Support Programme, Ethiopia

The Board approved unanimously the request to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to sign the contract for this full cost recovery project.

## 13. Any Other Business

There was no other business and the meeting concluded at 1305.

## Summary of action points arising

### Meeting of 20 April

(02)7	Board agenda to include an item on sector advisory groups following agreement of long term strategy.
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### Meeting of 14 December

(06)1	Presentation on English strategy at April meeting
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### Current meeting

(01)1	Secretary to schedule an update on status and tax project for a future meeting when most appropriate.
(01)2	Trustees to be sent copies of the letters which had been sent to their constituency MP concerning the activity of the British Council in their area.
(01)3	Trustees to send Bidesh Sarkar any suggestions for further improvement of the content or presentation of the Performance Report
(01)4	Performance Measurement team to review current net promoter score to suggest benchmarks and possible simplification.
(01)5	Forward schedule of key areas of strategic interest for focus in meetings over the coming twelve months to be prepared
(01)6	Draft Corporate Plan to be reviewed at April meeting for submission to FCO and approval in

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*\* Enquiries regarding the redacted information contained within this document should be directed to the Freedom of Information Officer, British Council, 10 Spring Gardens, London SW1A 2BN ([foi@britishcouncil.org](mailto:foi@britishcouncil.org))*